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ABSTRACT

Administrative steps necessary to provide needed educational programs for transitional students (students who have been declassified and are no longer eligible for special education programing) are discussed. The administrative steps include recognizing the new subpopulation of students, arranging for the gradual transfer of students from special education to regular education, determining available alternative programs and funding resources, and providing opportunities for changing teachers' expectations regarding the academic potential of transitional students. Along with the administrative needs, the school psychologist needs to assume a consultative role in assisting instructional personnel in working with transition students. Research is needed in the areas of identification, instruction, and assessing the academic gains of this population in nonspecial educational curricula. (Author/PHR)

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Administrative Interventions To Provide Educational Services For Declassified Students[1]

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Administrative Interventions To Provide Educational Services For Declassified Students[1]

Previous investigations have indicated that the inclusion of adaptive behavior in the eligibility criteria for the classification of students in special education as mentally retarded has had a number of effects. Among these are (1) a decrease in the number of students labeled mentally retarded (Fisher, 1978), (2) an increase in the number of students who are provided special education services under a different label (Scott, 1979) and (3) the identification of a new "sub-population" of students who have educational deficits but who do not fit the traditional classes/curriculum designed for students with educational/economic deficits typically dealt with in regular education programming (Scott, 1978).

These students who have been declassified and who are no longer eligible for any type of special education program have been termed "transitional" students in some states. Although they are no longer eligible for special education services, they appear to be educationally handicapped due to continued evidence of low academic functioning.

If these transitional students are to receive appropriate instructional services, a variety of administrative actions are required, ranging in scope from the state to the local, departmental, and classroom levels. In general, administrative actions should promote recognition that "transitional" students do exist,

[1]Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Psychological Association, New York, September, 1979.

recognition of the need for the gradual transfer of such students from special to regular education, and awareness of the characteristics and needs of these students on the part of administrators, teachers and counselors. Along with these administrative considerations, the school psychologist should give attention to an expanded consultative role in the schools.

Recognition of Need

State Level

In order to provide services for transitional students, the need for such services must first be recognized by state education agency officials. Recognition that a new sub-population of students exists needs to be accepted across divisions at the State level. Support for delivery of services to transitional students must be formalized in state administrative policy, which affects not only special education but regular education and "federal programming". For example, in Texas such support has been forthcoming as evidenced by a memo to school administrators by Harlan Ford, Deputy Commissioner for Programs and Personnel Development of the Texas Education Agency:

> During the two years since the passage of State Board of Education Policy 1107, some needs for additional procedures have become evident in order to provide for appropriate

implementation. While the purpose of the policy, to eliminate bias in the "referral, assignment, or placement of students to any of a variety of special programs" is being accomplished, the resultant removal of students who initially might have been placed inappropriately seems to be unfairly penalizing the very students the policy was designed to protect. Such students are now being returned to general education classes and are finding the adjustment difficult both academically and behaviorally (Ford, 1978).

The memo further states "The establishment of transitional services through the cooperation of special programs and general education is needed in order to enable the student and the receiving teachers to receive the support necessary for continued educational growth and development (Ford, 1978)".

Local Level

At the local level, before services can be provided to transitional students, recognition and support from the LEA administrative staff is required, including administrative staff in regular education, special education, and federal programs. For example, in the Corpus Christi Independent School District (CCISD) such support has been gained via a series of steps. Initially, meetings with the superintendent of the district were required. Next, meetings were required within the Division of Instruction (the assistant superintendent for instruction and directors representing special,

regular, and federal programming). The major message resulting from these meetings was that transitional students must receive needed services from existing programs or new regular education programming. A task force consisting of administrative and instructional personnel representing elementary and secondary programs in special, regular, and federal education was formed to study the problems of transitional students. The final step consisted of meetings with members of the special education and regular education consultative staff who work day-to-day with teachers and programs.

Transfer From Special To Regular Education

The smooth transfer of transitional students from special to regular education requires administrative support and approval at both the state and local levels and necessitates maximum cooperation between special and regular education administrators. The gradual phasing of transitional students from special into regular education also requires the development of administrative procedures to handle a variety of problems.

Initially, once transitional students are identified, a tracking system must be developed to follow them through the system. This typically would require cooperation between the special education department and the Division of Administration census office.

Administrative approval for transitional students to receive some special education services while, at the same time, receiving additional regular education services is also needed for the success-

ful transition of a student into the non-special education curriculum. Data collected in the CCISD has indicated that transitional students are educationally handicapped and require special assistance to maximize their educational success (Scott, 1979). Gradual phasing into regular education, necessitating the use of both special and regular education curricula, may require one to two years to accomplish. Administratively, this phase-in program may be problematic, especially in terms of accounting procedures. For instance, in the CCISD, transitional students who continue to receive some special education assistance are not counted in the state auditing system for determining the numbers of handicapped children served. This can prove to be a logistics problem for building principals, consultants, and secretarial staff. Caution should also be taken to assure that each student's transitional status is well documented in the student's eligibility folder so as not to complicate monitoring by federal and state agencies.

Consistent with PL 94-142 and state and local guidelines, administrative planning for transitional students must also include Admission, Review and Dismissal (ARD) Committee meetings in which individualized educational plans (IEP's) are developed. In the CCISD, an ARD/IEP meeting was held for each student being considered for declassification and transitional status. In such instances, it is necessary to stress, from the administrator's viewpoint, that each child must be considered individually; children should not be automatically dismissed en masse from special education and placed

in transitional categories. In the CCISD it was found that careful review by ARD/IEP committees and further assessment when necessary resulted in the discovery that 50-70% of the declassified students appeared to have learning handicaps which made them eligible for continued special education services under other categories (e.g. other health impaired, language/learning disabled, emotionally disturbed, etc.) {In order for the ARD/IEP procedure to work, administrative coordination from the central level to the building level, including the principal, special education consultant, school psychologist, counselor, regular and special education teachers, and parents is required.}

Alternative Programs/Resources for Transitional Students

For those declassified students who are not eligible for other special education services and, thus achieve "transitional" status, services must be sought through other programs and resources.

It is necessary for the school psychologist and other administrators associated with the declassified or transitional students to be familiar with instructional options which are available through regular and federal education curricula. This information is necessary so that administrative clearance can be arranged for the identification and admission of transitional students to different programs.

Possible alternative programs for transitional students may include locally funded regular education reading labs, math labs,

tutorial programs, and alternative education centers; state compensatory reading and math prescription laboratories and tutorial programs; federally funded Title I reading and math programs, computer assisted instruction, the tutorial program for neglected and delinquent students, migrant education, and the Follow-Through program.

To be able to utilize these programs for transitional students, administrators must be aware of program timelines and criteria for acceptance. For example, students can be served in the Title I program (as implemented in the CCISD) only according to the following procedures:

(1) the district determines the degree of economic disadvantage of entire campus populations. Essentially, this is the ranking from the lowest SES to the highest by surveying parents' income as shown on free lunch applications. Title I schools are identified in the spring of the school year so that students can be served the following fall.

(2) Once schools have been ranked, achievement tests (those specified by the Title I program) are administered within a school; a score below the 26th percentile is required for admission to the program. Thus, in the CCISD transitional students must be identified early in the year and must have applied for free lunches in order to be eligible for Title I services.

Administrators should also be aware of other possible resources to meet the needs of transitional students. Among these funding sources are Title IV-C, Title IV-B, and Title IV-D of the Educational Amendments of 1978 (PL 95-561). In the CCISD, Title IV-C funds were sought to implement a program for transitional students. The stated purposes of the proposed project were:

1) to refine the procedures used in the identification of transition students so as to determine the characteristics which set them apart from other low functioning students;
2) to establish a tracking system to monitor the movement of these students through the educational system;
3) to evaluate the effects of readily available placements (non-special education programs such as Title I, etc.) on the reading achievement and social skills of these students;
4) to provide and evaluate the effectiveness of specific interventions (teacher and parent consultation, home tutoring) on the reading achievement and social skills of these students;
5) to develop, when necessary, innovative instructional strategies for the remediation of deficits in the reading achievement of transition students;
6) to provide an extensive assessment of the needs of these students which will facilitate the development of guidelines for a program for transition students; and
7) to provide training and staff development for both regular

and special education personnel in order to familiarize them with the unique problems and characteristics of these transition students and to familiarize them with new intervention techniques as developed.

Although administrative awareness of programs and resources (grants, local and state funded programs, etc.) within the district is important in meeting the needs of transitional students, administrators should also be aware that all the special needs of this new sub-population of students cannot be met within the district. School administrators, especially school psychologists, must also be aware of community resources and should coordinate activities with other agencies (such as mental health/mental retardation and family counseling, low cost medical clinics, etc.) to provide services to transitional students.

Altering Expectations Concerning Transitional Students

The administrator's responsibilities concerning transitional students do not end with the provision of appropriate placement and programming. Altering local campus teaching staff and counselor expectations of transitional students is of prime importance in the ultimate integration of these students into the regular education program.

Research has shown that teacher-student interactions vary significantly depending upon the teacher's expectations of the student. For example, Good and Brophy (1977) revealed that teachers tend to wait less time for low achievers to answer, tend to leave

"lows" in failure situations, reward inappropriate behavior, criticize "lows" more frequently and praise them less than high functioning students, pay less attention to "lows" and demand less from them. Because most transitional students function at a low level academically and were formerly served in special education, teachers and counselors may expect "retarded" functioning to continue. In order to re-orient the local campus staff to the higher potential of transitional students, building administrators should arrange individual and group conferences which focus on one or more transition students familiar to the staff. A method effective in the CCISD has been to share specifics from the adaptive behavior assessment which provided examples of "nonretarded" behavior which a teacher, counselor, or other staff member can accept as an indication of higher intellectual potential.

Staff development for special education and regular education teachers appears to be important for changing expectations and expanding teachers' understanding of "transitional" students. Topics for staff development meetings might include adaptive behavior and current assessment techniques, practical examples of non-retarded behavior based on actual cases, effects of teacher expectations, self-fulfilling prophecies, and district consultation resources to assist teachers receiving transitional students. The administrator also needs to coordinate the counseling and guidance program within the district so that the guidance counselors in each of the schools in which transitional students are enrolled are aware of the students. 'In addition, it is important that the guidance counselor

understand the extent of the student's educational handicap, but at the same time understand the different expectancies and possible higher potential of these students. Central office administrative approval and local campus administrator approval must be acquired for the counselor to work with transitional students in an individual and/or group setting and for some type of follow-up system to be established.

Consultative Role of the School Psychologist

In addition to the previously outlined administrative actions, the school psychologist needs to assume a consultative role relative to the problems of transition students. The school psychologist as consultant can provide expertise in the following areas:

(1) Background information of PL 94-142 and state regulations.

(2) Familiarity with individual assessment techniques and placements of the student while in special education.

(3) Knowledge of adaptive behavior theory and current instruments (including the ABIC and the Texas Environmental Adaptation Measure) and how adaptive behavior data can shape other's expectancies of a student.

(4) Ability to explain to ARD-IEP committees and teachers and parents what adaptive behavior means in terms higher intellectual functioning.

(5) Familiarity with the programs and administrative and teaching personnel involved in placement alternatives for transitional students, knowing "who" teaches the children in each

of these programs. (Consultation requires personal knowledge and personal contact of school people dealing with the small numbers of transitional children).

(6) Prevention of inappropriate recycling of transitional students back through the special education referral and appraisal process.

(7) Familiarity with educational and behavioral interventions for transitional students and the ability, if necessary, to consult on the writing of individual educational plans for regular curriculum for transitional students.

Present and Future Needs

In summary, a number of administrative steps appear necessary to provide needed educational programs to transitional students. These administrative steps include recognition of a new sub-population of students (i.e., transitional students), arranging for the gradual transfer of transitional students from special education to regular education, determining available alternative programs and funding resources and providing opportunities for changing teacher expectations regarding the academic potential of transitional students. Along with the administrative needs, the school psychologist appears to need to assume a consultative role in assisting instructional personnel in working with transitional students. Further, research in the identification and instruction of transitional students is needed. Research aimed at determining if transitional students are evidencing academic gains in non-special education curricula is also needed.

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